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TWELFTH NIGHT

(W. SHAKESPEARE)

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BASIL BLACKWELL

OXFORD



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TWELFTH NIGHT

GENERAL NOTE

This series of introductions to the great classics of English literature is designed primarily for the upper forms of schools, though it is hoped that they will be found helpful by a much larger audience. Three aims have been kept in mind:

(A) To give the reader the relevant information necessary for his fuller understanding of the work.

(B) To indicate the main areas of critical interest, to suggest suitable critical approaches and to point out possible critical difficulties.

(C) To do this in as simple and lucid a manner as possible, avoiding technical jargon and giving a full explanation of any critical terms employed.

Each introduction contains questions on the text and suggestions for further reading. It should be emphasized that in no sense is any introduction to be considered as a crib or as a substitute for the reader's own understanding and appreciation of the work.

Notes on English Literature

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TWELFTH NIGHT

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BASIL BLACKWELL
OXFORD
1962

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY A. T. BROOME AND SON, 18 ST. CLEMENT'S, OXFORD
AND BOUND BY THE KEMP HALL BINDERY, OXFORD

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INTRODUCTION

When we study a play we usually break down our discussion into separate critical topics, such as Character, Plot, Structure, Theme, Language, Comic effects, and so on. This method has its disadvantages, and in order to guard against them, as far as possible, we must try to keep as close as possible to our actual experience of the play, in acting, watching, or reading. For a play is not built up of these separate elements of Character, Plot, Theme and the rest, in the way a building is composed of separate materials—steel, concrete, timber and so on. What we separate for the purposes of criticism is not separated in the living play. We have to consider Character when we are discussing all the other topics, for instance, and this is not because the different dramatic elements are integrated, like building materials, into a working whole, but because it is usually impossible to isolate them at *any* stage. If we assume, for instance, that the Theme of a play is separable from its characterisation and construction, we are dangerously free to select as we choose. If we keep insisting that the Theme is something expressed, explicitly and implicitly, in all the situations and characters, then we are likely to give a more faithful account of what the play is about.

We have to bear in mind something else. These dramatic elements co-exist, and their co-existence is not a static thing, like the building, but something which moves and changes in time, like music. Our account of Character or Theme or Comic effects may be distorted if we do not follow the whole dramatic

progression. [It is no use basing our account of Orsino or Olivia on our first impressions alone. And it is not enough, when discussing Orsino, to take all the scenes in which he appears without paying any attention to the surrounding scenes in which he does not appear but which have their part to play in our total impression of Orsino.] This matter of dramatic context is especially important when we bear in mind the greater rapidity of an Elizabethan production, which is not slowed up by modern complications of elaborate scenery or the punctuation of frequent curtains.

We must try to use our critical headings as guides, while keeping our eye on the overlapping and continuity of the dramatic form. This is a brief introduction and I can only hope to give you a few examples of the attempt to do this. My own account is also selective, and you should try not only to find more illustrations of my general comments, but try also to find exceptions. I have limited my discussion to three main topics—Theme, Character, and Language—but because I have tried to show the overlapping of different aspects of the play, I have also said something about other relevant topics such as Construction and Comic effects.

I am mainly concerned to indicate a flexible approach to *Twelfth Night*, and for this reason (also because there has been less important criticism of Shakespeare's comedies than of some other aspects of his work) you will find relatively few references to other critics. In my suggestions for further reading I have included examples of other plays of the period which use some of the methods and conventions of *Twelfth Night*. You will learn more about the disguise con-

vention, for instance, or the Braggart soldier, from comparing and contrasting Shakespeare's use with that of other dramatists than from reading the best critical generalisations about Elizabethan dramatic technique.

SECTION ONE

WHAT IS TWELFTH NIGHT ABOUT?

1

HOW DOES COMEDY EXPRESS A MORAL?

I want to begin by trying to decide what we mean when we ask, 'What is the play about?' When I ask this question I am not concerned with its story, or, in this case, its combination of several stories. I do not want to trace the development of the action from our first meeting with the lovesick Orsino, the exiled Viola, the mourning Olivia, and the killjoy Malvolio, through the intrigue and climaxes to the final curtain. Nor am I going to make a list of the prominent emotions in the play, and consider it as a play about love or friendship, though these broadly treated subjects will come into my discussion. What I am mainly interested in are Shakespeare's moral attitudes in *Twelfth Night*. I think it is important to begin a commentary on the play with this discussion. [What is the point of the play? What are its moral themes, or—to use a dangerous word—what are its lessons?]

You may wonder why we should ask this question about a gay and comic play which is subtitled, *What you Will*. My first reason for beginning with this question is this: it is one which has often been asked, and which has sometimes been answered in a somewhat narrow way. I shall come back to this reason. My other reason is this: [I believe that all good comedy

has a moral basis, and I think it is easier to talk about its treatment of character and its style, after we have tried to find this moral basis. *Twelfth Night*, for all its gaiety and fun, and for all its explicit defence of gaiety and fun—'cakes and ale'—and its criticism of killjoy attitudes, depends to a large extent on exposing and criticising human weaknesses.

I said that 'lesson' was a dangerous word. It is dangerous if we think of the moral lesson of a comedy as something separate from its fun, like a pill made palatable by a sugar coating. Moral criticism is the very stuff of comedy. *Twelfth Night makes fun of human weaknesses*, and this business of making fun is both critical and entertaining. The moral themes of the play are expressed in the comic characters, in the witty and satirical language, even in the farce and slapstick. This means that its moral concern, in a sense, is restricted. There are some subjects which it is difficult or undesirable to make fun of, usually because they arouse highly serious emotions.

Ben Jonson, a great comic dramatist writing roughly at the same time as Shakespeare, tells us in the prologue to his play, *Every Man in His Humour*, that comedy 'sports with human follies, not with crimes'. You may come across some exceptions to this rule—when you read Jonson's own *Volpone*, perhaps—but probably not in Shakespearean comedy. The question is of course complicated by the fact that plays like *Twelfth Night* and the earlier *As You Like It* are not pure comedy but a mixture of a comic action and a so-called 'romantic' action of love and adventure. What I have quoted about comedy being concerned with follies and not crimes applies to the comic parts

of the play. In *Twelfth Night* it happens also to apply to the love-story, but this is not always so, as those of you who know *Much Ado About Nothing* will realise.

The moral interest of comedy is usually limited to material we can bear to make fun of, but this does not mean that the comic dramatist criticises only trivial faults. The comic weakness may differ from the tragic weakness by having a different manifestation and a different effect, but the two may bear a close family resemblance to each other. In this play, for instance, one of the prominent weaknesses which Shakespeare mocks and punishes, is ambition. Malvolio's ambition, compared with Macbeth's, is foolish and not criminal. But the two ambitions depend, if you think about it, on disregard for other people and on a lack of realism. The important difference lies in the action, in the consequence of the fault. I do not want to go any further into a subject which is only partly relevant to *Twelfth Night*. If you read more Elizabethan drama, you can test what I have said by comparing the tragic and comic treatment of such faults as jealousy, pride, or greed.

[Let us get back to the way in which comedy makes its moral criticism comic.] Let us take a stock example of a comic situation in real life. We may laugh when a man slips on a banana-skin. This is a very short-lived reaction: there is one moment of ludicrous abasement. In a play, the ludicrousness is prolonged. We laugh in a more sustained and elaborate way, responding, so to speak, to men who keep on slipping on banana-skins. This is critical laughter, depending on a moral recognition of both the causes and the consequences of the comic situation. The point I want to emphasise

is this: we cannot separate our laughter (or amusement—it does not have to be laughter) from our perception of the stupidity, the clumsiness, the absentmindedness, or whatever it is, which makes someone slip and keep on slipping.

This may be true of real life too. We will probably laugh most readily if we are laughing critically; if the man who falls is pompous, wearing a bowler hat and carrying a briefcase. There is an element of surprise and incongruity: 'Fancy that man falling, so dignified and self-assured'. There is an element of disapproval or dislike: 'Serve him right for being so dignified and self-assured.' I may add that we will probably stop laughing, even at the pompous man in a bowler-hat, if he gets hurt. I am not saying this out of mere human decency, but also because it is very relevant to comedy, and especially to *Twelfth Night*.

What is the Shakespearean equivalent of the man slipping on the banana-skin? When Sir Andrew tries to dance, when Malvolio comes on in yellow stockings, cross-gartered, and even when Olivia falls in love with Cesario, whom we know to be a woman disguised as a man, we are reacting in much the same way as we react to the sudden incongruous but deserved sprawl of the pompous man. There is the same element of incongruity. The awkward gangling Sir Andrew should be the last person to make a guy of himself and make amorous jokes. The dignified Olivia, sworn to seven years secluded mourning, should be the last person to fall in love, at first sight, with a false 'outside'. There is the same element of disapproval, in varying degrees. It serves Sir Andrew right—poor pretentious fool—for trying to be a fine gentleman.

It serves Malvolio right for being both a killjoy and a hypocritical one. In a gentler way, it serves Olivia right for being such a fool, in the professional Fool's words, as to mourn extravagantly and make rash vows. Finally there is the comic safety-net, a protection from grave consequences. Olivia gets her 'outside', after all, though not the one she first fell in love with. Sir Andrew does not get injured in a duel, though he is harshly snubbed by Sir Toby. The question of Malvolio's injury, and our response to it, is one I shall come back to later, because it is a big and much-discussed issue. All I want to say at present, is that this softening of the consequences is especially marked in Shakespeare's comedies, and it is one of the things we mean by describing them as good-tempered.

A play, as I have suggested, prolongs the comic reaction. It is more than a collection of funny episodes. It accumulates its moral criticism as it goes on. We come to know what to expect of Sir Andrew and Malvolio, and there is added to our feelings of comic incongruity and comic deserts, a characteristic feeling of incorrigibility and persistence. The comic character goes on slipping. He is especially designed to do so, and I suggest that this feature of exaggeration and crazy consistency distinguishes the purely comic figures from some of the 'serious' characters, such as Olivia. The feeling of consistency and familiarity, which applies also to many comic strips, is again, in good comedy, connected with our moral response. We come to see the comic reactions to different characters and different situations pointing, like arrows, in the same moral direction. And another important source of entertainment—the comic

language—also points in this direction. When we see this kind of moral affinity linking different reactions, we call the affinity, the theme, or the moral, or the lesson, of the comedy. Except that in the case of Shakespeare, it is safer to speak, in the plural, of several themes.

Questions:

1. A comic writer often criticises and amuses at the same time. How is this managed in the jokes about Sir Andrew's learning? In the plot to make Sir Andrew and Cesario fight? In the first dialogue between Feste and Olivia?

2. Can you find any direct and explicit moral comment in the play? How is it made dramatic? Is it related to the less direct moral criticism made through the comic effects?

3. Some comedies are specialised in their appeal. Ben Jonson, for instance, writes strongly satirical comedy, Oscar Wilde relies heavily on verbal comedy, Shakespeare's own *Comedy of Errors*, based on Roman comedy, depends on the unravelling of an intricate plot. Is *Twelfth Night* specialised in any of these ways?


2.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY THE THEMES OF
'TWELFTH NIGHT'?

There seems to be some direction and consistency in the moral criticism made in this comedy. Sir Andrew, Malvolio and Olivia have something in common. But this does not mean that we can boil

down all the moral implications to a single theme. This brings me to the other reason I mentioned earlier, for discussing this topic first. Most scholars agree that the Elizabethans had a pronounced love of variety. Many Elizabethan comedies, with their multiple action, their song, dance, spectacle, plays-within-the-play, have much in common with the later Variety of music-hall, revue, radio and television. The tidy-minded scholar, even while accepting this, has a habit of preferring one answer to two or three, and in much of the discussion of *Twelfth Night* there seems to be a marked tendency to pick on a single formula for the theme. *Twelfth Night* is like most of Shakespeare's comedies, with the possible exception of the narrower didactic comedy of *Love's Labours Lost*, in being very rich in moral implications. Its pattern has the shifting variety of Feste's taffeta or opal, and is composed of many shades of human weakness and—I want to stress this—of human virtue.

A popular label in many commentaries is Self-Deception. I was taught at school that this was The Theme of the play, and many of my students take this so much for granted that they sometimes go to great lengths to apply it to all the characters and situations. I do not want to deny that Self-Deception is a theme. Quiller-Couch, in his introduction to the New Cambridge edition of the play, tries hard to reduce several characters to this moral interpretation. We can certainly agree that Orsino deceives himself about the nature of love, that Olivia deceives herself about the need to mourn her brother in seclusion from the world, and that Malvolio deceives himself about Olivia's love



for him. There is Self-Deception in these three characters, but the dramatic emphasis and the actual consequences are not all that similar. The critic can extract a theme here, but only by ignoring the flow of the play.

Orsino, for instance, is not entirely responsible for his fantasy: he persists partly because he is encouraged by Olivia's romantic mourning. She does not give the real sensible reason for refusing him—he has many fine qualities, she admits, but she cannot love him—until she speaks to Cesario; and even after that, for reasons of her own, she admits Orsino's embassy. What the audience first hears is Valentine's report that he has been turned away because of her vow. We need to say all this in order to recognise the emphasis placed on Orsino's illusion. We need also to compare it with Olivia's. Whereas Orsino persists until the end, Olivia's Self-Deception is brief. She drops it indeed during the very first scene in which the audience sees her, and for the rest of the play what is emphasised seems to be less Self-Deception than the deceitful male disguise of Viola. In Malvolio's case there is both Self-Deception and a very elaborate plot to deceive him, and the comic exposure and punishment of Malvolio places rather more emphasis on the evils of killjoy hypocrisy than on Self-Deception. I am not suggesting that this is all there is to it, but merely pointing out that it will not do to consider this play as a specialised dramatic discussion of a theme which is not only common to most comedy, but is moreover only one amongst several other moral themes in this play.

[We need not do any forced interpretation, ignoring

the dramatic emphasis, if we assume that there will probably be several themes. I would not argue that all comedies have Shakespeare's moral variety, but one of Shakespeare's great virtues is his refusal to simplify even in comedy. I suggest that we could make a list of several other themes as prominent as Self-Deception.

We could call it a play about Pride, which is present in Orsino, Olivia, Malvolio, and the other characters. Even Viola is accused of Pride by Olivia, and Feste's motive for baiting Malvolio is the injury to his professional Pride. It is in many cases Pride which causes the fall. *

Or we could call it a play about Folly. This is Twelfth Night, the Feast of Misrule, when law and order are turned upside down and Folly given its head. A Count is rejected for a page, and a woman at that. Olivia drops her foolish vow in a foolish susceptibility to outside appearance. The grave steward apes madness and is handed over to Sir Toby, drunken Lord of Misrule. The Fool plays Sir Topas. Everyone, except the Fool, is made a fool of in these reversals, and Folly is given almost a ritual celebration in the baiting of Malvolio. *

Folly is given its head, but criticised too. The Fool, as in other plays, is given the task of calling wise men fools. Olivia, Malvolio, Sir Toby, and Orsino are all accused of being mad or foolish. Viola and Sir Andrew are the only characters to call themselves fools.

We could go on, but I hope the point has been made. Shakespeare does not make one criticism of one failing. Nor indeed does he content himself with attack. His dramatic rendering of positive moral

strength is an important feature of his comic spirit. Even characters who are presented critically are endowed on occasion with admirable qualities. Orsino can admit, at the cost of contradicting himself, that men exaggerate and may be less constant than women. When we first meet Olivia she rebukes Feste and Malvolio with sense and gravity, and does not impress us as being a romantic self-deceiver. It is true that we must not fall into the old trap of treating every detail as a psychological clue. Orsino's comments are there partly in the interests of the dramatic irony and Olivia's rebukes are important guides to the character of Feste and Malvolio and start off their quarrel. But although such details contribute to good theatrical situations I do not think we can ignore the way in which they affect our impression of the speakers. They do something to modify our first view of Orsino and our first account of Olivia, and they fit with difficulty into a view of Self-Deception as the only theme.

In Olivia's case there are many examples of sense and unromantic honesty which are plainly part of dramatic portraiture. When she talks about her love for Viola she is self-critical and matter-of-fact. She knows that her eye is too great a flatterer for her mind, she knows she is being headstrong and unreasonable. In the dialogues with Viola she has dignity, sense, and a wry humour, which make her a person too complex to be fitted into the usual themes. We might indeed argue that the romantic mournful Olivia is one we are *told* about but never shown. She is not present in these lines:

Why then methinks 'tis time to smile again (3.1)

and

Be not afraid, good youth, I will not have you (3.1.)

There are many comedies which criticise harshly and some which present no normal moral standard within the play. Jonson and Wycherley, though very different from each other, are two examples of pejorative satirists of this kind. Shakespeare combines satire and sympathy, praise and blame, and this is one reason for calling this play good-tempered. We can draw up a list of virtues which correspond to the weaknesses. If there is Self-Deception, there is Candour and Insight. If there is Pride, it is true and false, with humility thrown in for good measure. If it is about Killjoy criticism it is also about Enjoyment and Gusto. And opposite qualities often appear in the same character. But Shakespeare does not merely temper his criticism within weak characters, he also shows strength. Viola is the main source of all these qualities I have just mentioned and although she is involved, by accident, in Deception, Folly, and Misunderstanding, she reacts with honesty, sense, and insight. The problem of theme, as I hope you realise, cannot be separated from character, and I shall be saying more about Viola's role in the next section.

Questions:

1. What are the failings and virtues, if any, in Sir Toby, Antonio, and Sebastian?

2. Why is Deception so common in comic plays and novels? Why does it often accompany Self-Deception as a basic theme or situation?

3. Look for some of the places where people are described as foolish and consider their place in the total impression. Can you add to my suggested list of themes?

SECTION TWO

THE CHARACTERS

1.

THE UNITY OF CHARACTER

Here are a few representative quotations from some of the chief characters:

Orsino:

For, such as I am all true lovers are,
Unstaid and skittish in all motions else,
Save in the constant image of the creature
That is beloved. (2.4.)

Olivia:

I love thee so, that, maugre all thy pride,
Nor wit nor reason can my passion hide. (3.1.)

Viola:

And I, most jocund, apt, and willingly,
To do you rest, a thousand deaths would die.
(5.1.)

Antonio:

I do adore thee so,
That danger shall seem sport, and I will go.
(2.1.)

Malvolio:

Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have
heard herself come thus near, that should she
fancy, it should be one of my complexion. (2.5.)

Sir Toby:

She's a beagle, true-bred, and one that adores me
 . . . what o'that?

Sir Andrew:

I was adored once too. (2.3.)

All the characters are speaking of love. In the case of Orsino, Olivia, and Viola, and perhaps Antonio, it is unrequited love. These characters are shown as deeply moved. Malvolio is thinking only of himself. Sir Toby is appreciative but off-hand. Sir Andrew is a comic object to be adored, but the nostalgic memory is endearing as well as funny. These extracts represent the unifying pattern of resemblance and contrast, which defines emotion, parodies it, makes comic versions look ridiculous, and shows very different characters all in the same boat. There is of course another unifying pattern, that of actual amorous relationships. Viola loves Orsino who loves Olivia who loves Viola: an amorous circle, or perhaps triangle, of complication and irony. Antonio loves Sebastian whose cheerful acceptance of Olivia allows the pattern to reassemble into pairs. They are joined by Sir Toby and Maria. Sir Andrew is snubbed, Malvolio angered and disillusioned, and Antonio is at least pardoned by Orsino. The Fool's detached melancholy song after these pairings makes them more emphatic: Ngaio Marsh made Feste in love with Olivia in her production of the play, but this seems not only unjustified but obtuse. The characters are united by the love-story, both in an evaluation of different kinds of love, and in a fantastic plot which has to be straightened out to give the happy ending.

This is only a part of the whole pattern. All the other themes, as I have suggested, are expressed through many characters, and each makes its own thread which helps to tighten the dramatic structure in the interests of moral clarity and continuity of interest, surprise, irony, and tension. The unity of this play is an *imaginative* unity, and I am using this word precisely, to describe what Coleridge called the *modifying* power of imagination: the way in which words or actions or characters influence each other, or our response to each, and so fuse into a unity. Shakespeare is not merely accumulating several examples of self-love, pride, or folly, and making a series of separate items. He is making one kind of pride explain and define another, one kind of love reveal the weakness or strength of another.

In a play without a Viola, would we feel that Olivia's attitude to her brother's death is extravagant? Or that Orsino's love is inturned and easy? In a play without Olivia, Orsino, or Viola, would we feel the comic inadequacy of Sir Andrew as a wooer? Or Malvolio's greed and self-seeking in his love? In a play without the Fool, would we see so plainly the folly of the wise? I do not think that we can answer these questions, which are not rhetorical, with a flat 'No' in every case. But I am sure that each character lights up the others.

It is not simply a matter of the serious main-plot making the sub-plot's version of love or pride seem silly. This *modifying* works in two directions. There are one or two moments when Sir Andrew's realistic appraisal of his chances with Olivia reflects on Orsino's romantic refusal to take no for an answer, though it is

true that the serious love-scenes make Sir Andrew's gauche gallantry with Maria even more ridiculous. It is not necessary that we should be explicitly comparing one character with another in the same situation. We need not remember that revenge has already been at work in the play to feel Orsino's threats at the end as less unexpectedly melodramatic than they would seem, I think, in a play without a comic revenge theme. The play creates a context as it goes along, and our impression of one character is almost unconsciously defined by our impression of another. At times, of course, the contrast is very pronounced, as in the way in which the braggart and the woman are set against the courageous Antonio. There is an interaction set up in the play which not only defines character but makes it possible to accommodate many different types and attitudes within one dramatic 'world'. There are many Elizabethan plays with a multiple action where the characters are merely linked by place or social relationship or accidental encounter. Shakespeare provides variety without sacrificing unity—it is indeed a unity of value as well as the unity of a well-made play.

There are many links which I have not mentioned. There is much more social coherence and relation than in, say, *Romeo and Juliet*, or *Much Ado*. Shakespeare can make a unity out of characters who have merely a servant-master relationship, true, but there is a special intimacy, a family air, about *Twelfth Night*. The Fool moves from one great house to the other, with his accompaniment of yearning song. He sings similar songs to all. The comedy spares not even Viola, who is trapped with Sir Andrew by the mock

challenge. Ben Jonson, in *The Silent Woman*, tried to duplicate the usual exposure of the braggart soldier and has two victims. Shakespeare by an audacious stroke matches the romantic heroine with the ridiculous braggart. His success is a demonstration of the homogeneous structure he has created.

Questions:

1. Serious characters are satirised. Viola is involved in farce, though she keeps her dignity. How is Olivia made part of the comic action?
2. Have you any clear impressions of Illyria as a place and a community?
3. The characters are related by contrast and parallel. Are there any contrasts and parallels in the situations?

2.

THE SERIOUS CHARACTERS

I want to concentrate my discussion on Viola, and it is, as I have been suggesting, impossible both to look fully at the movement of the whole play, and to isolate one character. If we are looking at Viola properly we must look also at Olivia and Orsino, and indeed at other characters too. The objection to making separate character-sketches in discussing a play rests on this sense of unity.

We should be less aware of the comfort and artifice in Orsino's love were it not for Viola. We should also be less aware of his capacity for sense and insight. Viola, representative of true feeling, brings out not

only Orsino's limitations but also his full character. She draws out his sincerity and momentarily dispels his selfish absorption in fantasy, just as some people in life bring out 'the best in us'. Put in dramatic terms, we say that Shakespeare first shows Orsino in an enclosed world of dreams, and then creates the need for him to respond to a character whose depth of feeling impresses him. Viola's relationship with Olivia works in the same way. After we have noticed the reactions of two bereaved sisters, we then see them in contact. Olivia is not only impressed by Viola, like Orsino, but falls in love with her. It is difficult to separate character from *function*, so delicately has Shakespeare made his moral contrast move into actual relationships.

And Viola's relations with Orsino and Olivia are presented with irony and contrast. Orsino cannot see her as she is, so her love must be secret. Olivia cannot see her as she is, so humiliates both Viola and herself by false love. Viola's disguise isolates her. Like Feste, she moves freely and independently among the others, carrying out orders, subject to criticism and rough treatment. She plays a man, Feste plays Fool. They speak out of this detachment and disguise, commenting wryly on themselves and the others.

Viola first comes on after we have been introduced to Orsino's music and languid fantasy. Her scene with the Captain brings crisis and action after marked inaction. There is some wordplay but both characters have to speak in a fairly matter-of-fact way, asking for information and giving it and making plans. The final contrast is strong: this is another sister who has lost her brother, another way of mourning. Viola's words

about her brother's possible death come immediately after Valentine and Orsino have discussed Olivia's loss and her reaction.

When Viola meets Olivia in 1.5, she shows sense, candour, and curiosity. She insists on her role as proxy wooer with no attempt to disguise the artificial situation. Her exaggerations and casualness give scope for the actress (then actor) to show a certain tension and cattiness as she faces her rival, but they also contrast once more with the heady Orsino music. Olivia joins in the barbed contemptuous compliments, showing some coolness. When Viola has to praise the unveiled face, with the tiny jealous flash, 'If God did all', her spontaneous praise is answered by Olivia's satire. And throughout the scene (which I shall be discussing later under *Language*) there is the under-current of dramatic irony, in the covert allusions to disguise which the audience understands and Olivia, to her cost, does not.

The dramatic irony is strong, too, in 2.4, when Orsino is struck by Viola's verdict on the music:

It gives a very echo to the seat
Where Love is throned.

Viola is literally sitting at the feet of her love, and, Orsino, without understanding, again creates that *rapport* between audience and stage which comes from our feeling that we are in a closer relation to facts or character than is someone in the play. He first shows interest in something other than his love for Olivia. Moreover, he is forced to admit (since he thinks he is talking to a man) that men do exaggerate their love and that women are more constant. This means a lot

from Orsino, always harping on constancy. He speaks with commonsense when he advises Viola to marry a younger woman, and there is another shift of irony in her lament for beauty's frailty. Later she tries to reason him out of his refusal to take no for an answer. She says, in effect, 'Put yourself in someone else's place':

Say that some lady, as perhaps there is,
Hath for your love as great a pang of heart
As you have for Olivia: you cannot love her;
You tell her so; must she not then be answered?

But he is back in self-absorption, and tells her that women's hearts are too small, that their love is too easily revolted, that they are not constant at all. Viola answers with the last ironical speech about the sister who died of love, speaking out of her own real reserve and patience.

Shakespeare does not show her always in control. The situation makes a fool of her, as she says to Olivia, and she is involved in the mock duel, and criticised by Antonio in public. There is a superficially similar situation in an earlier play, Robert Greene's *James the Fourth*, where Dorothea, an injured and disguised queen, is also challenged to fight. Unlike Viola, she is made to fight, fights bravely and is wounded. Shakespeare, even in a play sometimes described as unreal and remote, is more realistic than Greene. The heroes and heroines of the so-called 'romantic' parts of plays by Greene or, later, Dekker, are shady and conventional models of beauty and constancy. When Lady Anderson, in *James the Fourth*, falls in love with Dorothea as Olivia falls in love with Viola, there is a little dramatic

irony and innuendo but nothing like the varied human detail of Olivia's proud humiliation, or of Viola's fluctuating emotions of astonishment, compassion, resignation, embarrassment, and humiliation. Viola may be remote and unreal compared with Hedda Gabler, though I think she compares quite well with many modern heroines. Within the frame of love-complications and disguise, Shakespeare endows his chief characters with some variety of reaction and change.

The remoteness and unreality is undeniably present at the end. Orsino turns to Viola as second string after Sebastian has roughly surveyed the situation, decided that Olivia is sane, and accepted her. The final curtain falls on an arbitrary and conventional pattern. But the abruptness and implausibility are softened. Orsino has been very fond of Viola, and remembers those pieces of dramatic irony, at last seeing the point. And, dramatically important, we have seen them in their close relation, in scenes charged with intense feeling. Moreover, Shakespeare raises the emotional temperature before doing the pairing-off, with Orsino's savage threats to Olivia and Viola, though you may think this yet another implausibility. But however conventional the machinery of disguise and final pairing (just the ending he rejected in *Love's Labours Lost*) he does animate his conventions. Some of the scenes between Orsino and Viola, or Olivia and Viola, inject true feeling into the disguise-convention just as the scene in church in *Much Ado*, where Beatrice and Benedict declare their love, humanises the machinery of deception and eavesdropping. The situations are based on conventions, on traditional and accepted

implausible shortcuts which have some dramatic advantages, but the serious characters have life and individuality.

Questions:

1. Shakespeare makes his serious characters individual in various ways. How does he present the character of Sebastian?

2. What aspects of Viola are shown in her relations with Feste?

3. How does Viola compare with Rosalind, another character disguised as a boy?

3.

THE COMIC CHARACTERS

I have already suggested that this is not a play where some characters are made figures of fun, and others treated sympathetically. There is a flow of sympathy in both main plot and comic sub-plot. But it is true that there is a difference between characters like Viola and Olivia, even though they are criticised and involved in comic scenes, and characters like Sir Toby and Sir Andrew, even though they are involved in the flow of sympathy. It has often been said that comedy is intellectual in its appeal, while tragedy is emotional. *Twelfth Night* resists this definition, but we can still see that Viola and Olivia have a light and shade lacking in the comic characters. It is the simplification which makes a comic character both amusingly larger and more foolish than life and this simplification shuts off a certain amount of ordinary human sympathy from the comic characters even in this play.

What do we mean by simplification? A good caricature—say, of a politician—is amusing because of its exaggeration and yet instructive because of its basic truth. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew may be exaggerated portraits, larger, funnier, and more open to criticism than real sots and simpletons, but they bear a recognisable relation to the real sots and simpletons. Exonerating circumstances are cut out: we do not say, after mocking them, ‘But remember what has made them like this’. Exceptions and inconsistencies are also cut out: we do not say, ‘But they are different with so-and-so, or good at so-and-so’. They exist for the dramatic space of the play, with no implied past or present, no suggestion of complexity or change. Or at least very little. All the main characters change, have more than one facet, have imaginable (and sometimes mentioned) past and future. Sir Toby and Sir Andrew exist as types. I hope that you will already be thinking that this is too sweeping a statement, but I should like to leave it at that for the present, and return to it later.

We need to say more about these characters (and others) than that they are caricatures of human weaknesses. They are fresh versions of traditional types, stock characters with a long history in the drama and in some other literary forms. Sir Andrew owes something to the Roman *miles gloriosus*, the braggart soldier whose boasts are exposed and punished by a real challenge. You will find this type in Plautus (in a play called *Miles Gloriosus*) and in Ben Jonson (there are several examples but the best is Bobadill in *Every Man in His Humour*) and of course elsewhere in Shakespeare, with Parolles in *All's Well That Ends Well* and Falstaff.

Falstaff reveals another traditional type, the

drunken roysterer, who may date back to figures like Riot in Morality plays, or to more than one of the medieval Seven Deadly Sins. Sir Toby represents this aspect of Falstaff though he and Sir Andrew together only add up to a selection from the complexity of the great fat knight. They are an interesting pair, and should not really be separated when we are thinking about comic characters. They are designed as physical opposites, fat man and thin man (compare Sancho Panza and Don Quixote, or Laurel and Hardy), as comedian and stooge, and also as rogue and fool. Remember that appearances are very important, especially in Elizabethan comedy: there is the comic appearance, underlined by contrast, and the comic action, part farce, part parody, of their singing, dancing, courting, and fighting. Everything which is performed proficiently in the main plot is performed with comic clumsiness in the sub-plot. There is the two-way relationship I have already mentioned. Viola's courtly language and conduct (admired by Sir Andrew) is guyed by the comic courtship and also makes the clumsiness and aspiration greater by contrast. The joke is heightened, and unity ensured, by the fact that Viola herself does some guying.

To recognise the traditional stereotype which is present in these comic characters is plainly not enough. Sir Andrew boasts, and is humiliated by the challenge invented by Sir Toby and Fabian. But he is very different from the usual braggart soldier. His talk about duelling is only one part of his general aspiration to be a gentleman (according to the Renaissance ideal which combined prowess in arms, culture, and love—Sir Philip Sidney is a good historical example) and he

has none of the boastful military anecdotes and vocabulary of Bobadill and Falstaff. He has strong resemblances to Master Stephen, in *Every Man in His Humour*, another simple and comically unaccomplished aspirant to gentlemanly ideals, and another simpleton who is easily 'gulled' (deceived and fooled) by clever rogues. Sir Andrew is a comic butt who is more endearing and sympathetic than his Jonsonian relations. His boasting is limited. He admits that he has not 'followed the arts' and draws attention to the limitations of his French. His most striking boasts are artless comments on his reputation as a fool. Even more important are tiny touches like his realistic appraisal of his chances with Olivia, and the rightly famous line which clinches sympathy: 'I was adored once too.' It is a line worth thinking about.

Similarly, Sir Toby is a departure from Riot. Only the more harmless and cheery qualities of debauchery are present in his gluttony, sloth, and drunkenness. He is given his moment of sympathy in the celebrated reproach to Malvolio: 'Dost thou think because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?' He gulls Sir Andrew and Malvolio (though Maria is the organising genius here, and for her own ends) but he is far from being the proficient trickster. He earns a bloody coxcomb from the plot against Sir Andrew and Viola, and he is made to feel that he has bitten off more than he can chew in the plot against Malvolio. He gets the better of witbouts with Sir Andrew and rejects him in a mild comic version of the rejection of Falstaff (with many differences), but Maria is surely above him in the pecking-order and the marriage with which he 'rewards' her is a final suggestive touch to

a type who is given animation and sympathy as well as comic rebuke.

The centre of the comic action proper is Malvolio. Everything which I have said about Sir Toby and Sir Andrew applies more elaborately to him. He too is based on a stock figure, the Carping Killjoy, so common in Ben Jonson. Jonson uses characters like Crites, Asper, and Macilente, partly as mouthpieces for his own attacks, partly as criticised exaggerations, and one recent critic, Martin Holmes, in his book, *Shakespeare's Public*, has even suggested that Malvolio may represent Jonson, who sometimes criticised Shakespeare as a dramatist.

Malvolio is a complicated ill-wisher. He is given some Puritanical qualities, but Maria makes explicit his insincerity and jealousy: 'The devil a Puritan he is.' Though we should note that the insincere Puritan was common as a dramatic character, and there are some spirited instances in Jonson, including Ananias in *The Alchemist* and Zeal-of-the-Land-Busy in *Bartholomew Fair*. Malvolio criticises disorder less from principle than from jealousy, and this is underlined by his jealous attitude to Feste and Viola, and in the small reference to Fabian's reason for animosity. Feste emphasises the revenge motive at the end, when he quotes Malvolio's scornful criticism of his fooling. Malvolio's insincerity emerges most plainly in his fantasy about marriage with Olivia, where comfort, power, and perhaps a touch of carnal desire, all have a place. Like the other comic characters, he is a mixture of types.

And like them Malvolio is certainly not an entirely unsympathetic character; indeed, there is a long-

fatuus fastuous

standing opinion that he is almost a tragic figure, for whom we feel so much sympathy that his baiting fails to be comic. There are several things to bear in mind here. There is the historical fact that Elizabethans were less likely to be shocked at the game of madness than a modern audience; there is evidence for this in reports of visits to Bedlam for sightseeing rather than welfare inspection, and in many instances of comic mad scenes in other plays. More important, I think, is our recognition of Shakespeare's ability to criticise and sympathise at the same time. We are used to this in tragedy, but it is a rarer attitude in comedy. Moderation and tolerance, as I have suggested, run through the whole play. Orsino and Olivia are criticised but respected: they are endowed with a capacity for emotional affectation *and* sense. Sir Andrew has his moment of true sympathy. Sir Toby feels that he has gone too far, and has his moment of commanding respect for cakes and ale. Viola, the main source of sense and feeling, is not exempt from comic deception.

Malvolio's case is not very different, I suggest, from these. He too typifies Shakespeare's refusal to make caricature and to shut off sympathy. A famous writer on comedy, Henri Bergson, in his book on *Laughter* suggests that comedy depends on what he calls 'the momentary anaesthesia of the heart'. This holds for some comedy, but not for Shakespeare's and if we claim that Malvolio is too sympathetic for strong comic treatment we are blinding ourselves to this fact. Malvolio is not a pleasant character, and his unpleasantness lies in his carping and in his dreams of wealth and power—not to mention the juxtaposition of these two characteristics. But even his carping has

mixed effects. We resent his criticism of Viola and Feste—because it is unjustified and because these characters command respect and love—but his criticism of Sir Toby and Sir Andrew should get some sympathy from anyone who has ever had noisy neighbours. It is underlined by the similar criticisms of Olivia and Feste: there are more than two sides in this play, and at times our responses are directed by dramatic alliances. Malvolio's attack on Feste modifies our response to his attack on Toby, but Feste's criticism of Sir Toby's weakness reinforces our respect for the steward who is doing his duty. He is also sympathetic because he is in part the victim of accident: Olivia, whom he loves, is so distraught with her love for Viola that she misguidedly hands over the mad Malvolio (who has disappointed her when she seeks his sober company) to her drunken cousin. Malvolio's complaints about this are reasonable. So too is his response to the Fool's brainwashing in the dark room, where he is dignified and sincere. But this dignity does not destroy the comedy, as long as we accept the possibility of enjoying a good comic scene, where ridicule is largely deserved, while recognising that Malvolio is really suffering, and perhaps more than he deserves. It is important, too, that the baiting is carried out by a popular character, the Fool. The scene is not so different from many pieces of clowning with authority (in Charlie Chaplin's films, for example) and popular prejudice against authority tempers our sympathy, just as the sympathy makes the laughter less than harsh. So at the end, where Malvolio's dignified letter and words of violent threats of revenge are set against Olivia's sympathy for him and our

sympathy for the Fool. There is something to be said for Malvolio, but it is said within the play, and only those people who like their sympathies clear cut, who find it hard to accept some qualities in Falstaff *and* some in Hal, or some in Antony *and* some in Caesar, will find it impossible to laugh and sympathise. The characters in both plots are so conceived and constructed as to guide the audience to a complex response in which criticism and tolerance, laughter and sympathy, are all involved. The weakness is not so exaggerated that it is removed from the normal human context, and although Shakespeare's comedy depends on distortion and caricature, it is infused with tolerance and truth. It is no mere cliché to call *Twelfth Night* a good-tempered and mature play if we recognise this.

Questions:

1. It has been said that the real 'Fools' of the play are Sir Toby and Sir Andrew. Consider their appearance, speech, and actions, and say what you think. You might also consider the view that the Fool (about whom I have deliberately said very little) is the least foolish character.

2. [Satirical — funny — pathetic — admirable — all these words might be used of Malvolio. Look at the various scenes in which he appears and see how useful these adjectives are in describing your response. How far is he responsible for his sufferings?]

SECTION THREE

LANGUAGE

1.

THE MIXTURE OF PROSE AND VERSE

Like many other Elizabethan plays, comic and tragic, *Twelfth Night* is written in a flexible medium of prose, blank verse, and song, a mixture still found in many musical plays and in pantomime. At the simplest level this provides variety for the ear, but the variety comes out of a subtle discrimination of characters and events, and guides our response in ways which need careful scrutiny.

There is no social division between the main plot, which uses most blank verse, and the sub-plot, which uses most prose, so it cannot be said here, as of other plays, that verse is (roughly speaking) allocated to the upper class and prose (roughly speaking) to the lower.

We might say that verse is the main language for serious emotion, prose for comedy, but since I have already suggested that there is emotion in our response to the comedy, and criticism, comic or satiric, in our response to the main-plot, we have to admit many exceptions. And when we look even at those scenes written in verse, another kind of contrast appears, the contrast between kinds of poetic language. As I am discussing linguistic contrast, it would be artificial to take only the contrast between verse and prose.

If we take the first three scenes of the play, we find that first comes the mannered and decorative language of Orsino and Valentine. Next comes the brisker and simpler verse of Viola and the Captain. Last Sir Toby, Maria, and Sir Andrew, speaking prose. The difference we notice is not just the difference between the verse scenes and the prose, but the difference between three different attitudes, expressed in appropriate language. We could be vague and call those attitudes to life, but we can be more precise and say that all the differences are pinpointed by one subject of common discussion, the subject of Olivia's vow. I have already discussed the contrast between the two first scenes, and after this comes Sir Toby's brusque and casual prose: 'What a plague means my niece, to take the death of her brother thus? I am sure care's an enemy to life' (1.3.) Orsino's extreme admiration for Olivia and Toby's insensitive scorn are excellently moderated by Viola, less by direct comments than by her own reserve and practical discussion. The differences in language are the vehicle for the differences in attitude.

The third scene is entirely in prose, and there is some noticeably rough and colloquial language which makes a more general contrast to the various kinds of poetry we have already heard. Prose is a good vehicle for the comic action, and is another source of our feeling that the sub-plot flouts its irreverence in the face of the graver and deeper emotions of the main plot. It is a source of the contrast which sometimes makes the comic characters seem crudely insensitive, and which sometimes makes them seem honestly matter-of-fact and realistic. It is not that verse could not express these attitudes but that prose sharpens all

the emotional contrasts. The prose is not, however, all rough and plain. It has its own mannerisms of word play, repartee, and satire. I have quoted one extract from Sir Toby's rough matter-of-fact prose. Now look at this more formal piece, addressed to Sir Andrew:

'Wherefore are these things hid? wherefore have these gifts a curtain before 'em? are they like to take dust, like Mistress Mall's picture? why dost thou not go to church in a galliard and come home in a coranto?' (1.3.)

Look at the form of each sentence, at the relative length, at the imagery, and try to see what I mean by calling this a mannered piece of prose. Then think about its relation to the mannered language of the first scene, and also to Sir Andrew's aspirations and regrets—'O, had I but followed the arts!'—and his innocent howlers—'What is pourquoi? do or not do?' Sir Toby is contrasted not only with Orsino and Olivia but also with his weak friend, to whom he sometimes speaks in a rough nudging contempt which is conveyed in colloquialism (there is a little in the speech above) and in formal balance or exaggerated metaphor. It is not enough to say that such scenes are unemotional and therefore use prose. We can only appreciate the continuity of contrast and criticism if we look at the prose in more detail. The language conveys character and relationships and its contrasts cannot be separated from the contrasts between characters and emotions and values.

Malvolio, for instance, is another prose-speaking character. Can we guess at Shakespeare's reasons for

giving him little verse? To put it another way, can we pick out some of the ways in which prose contributes to our impressions of Malvolio? The way to do this is not to list his characteristics and then try to argue the appropriateness of the medium. If we do this we may say, for instance, that it seems suitable that a steward, concerned with the business of keeping order, making announcements, going on messages, should speak prose. But what about Valentine and Viola? Or we might suggest that his killjoy attitude is fittingly expressed in prosaic speech. But what about Sir Toby? The best way to set about commenting on the relation between character and language is to look at actual examples, see how they seem to impress us, and then fit them back into general impressions. We find, for instance, that there is one moment when Malvolio's prose is significantly contrasted with Viola, whose verse soliloquy in 2.2., after Malvolio has given her the ring, seems to dismiss his jealous rudeness. His prose speeches to Olivia, in 3.4., when she sends for him because he is 'sad and civil', contrast with her distracted poetry before he comes on. These are some small local effects of contrast, but when we look at all Malvolio's scenes the use of prose seems to be suitable to his comic treatment. Although there is emotional response to these comic characters, it is cooler than our response to the lovers' confusion, and it seems reasonable to suggest that here we can find a fairly consistent correlation between prose and comic response.

There are some characters who never speak in verse (look for them), but none who never speak in prose, though Orsino's prose is rare. We might

suggest that the courtly characters speak in verse when they are making love or discussing love, and in prose when they are involved in comic action or witticisms. But Olivia and Viola speak a good deal of prose, and if we look at their first meeting we will find some interesting variations on the use of prose.

Before I consider this important scene, I should like to mention a small example of the same kind of subtle contrast. This comes at the beginning of 1. 4. in a brief prose dialogue in which Viola and Valentine discuss the way in which the new page has quickly found favour with the Count. There is a quiet-toned question and answer which might easily have gone into verse. As it stands it throws into high relief Orsino's flourishing entry; 'Who saw Cesario, ho!' which is followed by an intense speech about unclasping the book of his secret soul. In the big scene we are going to look at there are more conspicuous contrasts, but I mention this one in the hope that you will look alertly at details as well as emphatic effects.

Olivia's first words of poetry provide a formal introduction to Viola's entry and the tense dialogue which follows:

Give me my veil: come throw it o'er my face—
We'll once more hear Orsino's embassy.

With Viola's entry we move back into prose, but there is nothing informal or loose about such sentences as, 'The honourable lady of the house, which is she?' or 'Most radiant, exquisite, and unmatchable beauty!' The formality points the delicate insult she offers in asking which lady is Olivia, and in praising so extravagantly the veiled beauty which she has never seen.

This is interrupted by the more informal, 'I pray you, tell me if this be the lady of the house, for I never saw her. I would be loath to cast away my speech. . . .' Prose suits the mock formality of the conned speech, which is 'poetical', as she says, though not verse. It suits too the bantering interruption and the throwaway casualness of her admission that this is a rehearsed set piece. This is another contrast with the Orsino music, though it serves also to start off a certain prickly tension between these two women. It is also Viola's assumption of the conventional act of the pert page, a comic type we find in John Lyly and in *Love's Labours Lost*.

These are all important directions to producer and actor (now actress on the modern stage), but it would surely be possible to make all these effects in verse. The most important reason for the preliminary use of prose is seen when Viola is driven outside her brief, and asks her rival, with natural curiosity, to show her face. Olivia's unveiling has been slightly prepared in her earlier lines, 'Yet you began rudely? What are you? What would you?' where her interest in Viola first appears. The unveiling breaks the fervent vows made by Olivia and reveals to Viola a good reason for jealous despair. It is a crisis for both characters and it dissolves the casual and affected prose into intense and ironical praise, 'Tis beauty truly blent', and so on, with its contrasting appearance of spontaneous admission, wrung from Viola as fervent testimony to a rival's beauty. For the audience it has the implications of, 'If only it were not true beauty', for Olivia it is the voice of impassioned praise. It contrasts with the studied banter of earlier prose, and then with

Olivia's cool, slightly flirtatious reply about making an inventory of beauty, which returns to prose. But Viola goes on in poetry, turning from praise to blame with, 'I see you what you are, you are too proud' which is again, with what follows, a natural outlet for her true feeling. Just as she can force Orsino on to her emotional level, so she forces Olivia out of her cool mannered prose. Olivia significantly moves into verse by completing Viola's iambic line with, 'How does he love me?' Banter is set aside, and Olivia at last talks with sense and truth not about her dead brother and her vow (which she has broken without comment) but about her respect for Orsino and her inability to love him.

Viola's willow-cabin speech strikes us less as the advertised prepared piece (though it says just what Orsino has told her to say, as you will find if you look back) than as a spontaneous expression of her own love and constancy, forced from her by her recognition of her rival. With a final irony, it completes Olivia's capitulation though one feels that Viola is too ingrossed in her own emotion to hear the response, 'You might do much'.

This is perhaps the most elaborate modulation of prose and verse, but as I have said, it is only a conspicuous example of the subtle dramatic continuity and contrast of language which makes the mixed medium a unity.

Questions:

1. Look at the scenes between Antonio and Sebastian, mostly in verse but with one interesting exception. Look at the dialogue between Feste and

Viola in 3.1., and her comments after it. What are the effects of prose and verse here?

2. Feste never speaks in blank verse, but moves from prose to song. Can you suggest reasons for this? Have his songs any dramatic function beyond supplying musical entertainment? How are they related to the themes? Do they contribute to our impression of his, and any other, character? What kind of introduction and reaction does Shakespeare use as a 'frame' for these songs? Pay special attention to the last song, which some critics think may have been written by Robert Armin, a famous singing Fool.

3. Collect some examples of rhyme used amongst blank verse, and think about the effects of these variations.

2.

CHARACTER AND LANGUAGE

It is often suggested that Shakespeare's characters can be identified by their language. We have already seen that this does not always hold for the verse-prose division, where the movement from one mode to another is often determined by the desire for some local contrast. The dramatist may be emphasising a particular emotion, rather than a character, or he may be making a point about one character and allowing its appropriate linguistic expression to infect a whole scene. But there are certainly some features of style which seem to be used to bring out qualities and characteristics.

There is the rich and elaborately formed language

of Orsino, which acts as an overture, tells us something about him and his love, and which, as we have seen, is thrown into relief by the two succeeding scenes. Let me here suggest one danger of looking closely at style. I have known students who have tried too hard to separate style from subject-matter. I think it is important to see the sensuousness of Orsino's language as inextricably bound up with what he does and with what surrounds him. 'If music be the food of love' makes a different impression in the book and on the stage. Orsino is talking about real music, which we have heard, with him, which provides an atmosphere for the ear (especially in the absence of lavish scenery) and which combines with poetry to introduce us to the man. He provides himself with amorous atmosphere, with music and flowers. We should not discuss the sensuousness of style without noticing the sensuousness of the real music.

Sensuousness is not the only quality of Orsino's language. It is also analytical and reflective. His long-drawn out sentences and sustained images are typical of the way he is toying minutely with his love. His reflective habit is to some extent shared by Olivia, Viola, and Antonio, the other serious lovers, but their speeches are usually less elaborate in imagery. Look at them. What he is saying is determining the style. He does not merely demand music but explains why—because he thinks it may make him sick of love and provide a cure. Then he dismisses the music with another explanation—because love makes everything it absorbs valueless. The change of mood and explanation contribute to our impressions of langour, love-weariness, and that restlessness which the Fool is

to compare with taffeta and the opal. Again, the music—as Orsino tells us—contributes to these emotions. The repeated strain has ‘a dying fall’, a technical comment and a melancholy association. The image of the wind which he uses to describe the music has its appeal to touch, sight, and smell, but as well as this sensuous increase there is the appropriateness in the ‘stealing and giving odour’. This seems just right for Orsino’s fluctuations of desire and argument and is itself another instance of his minute analysis. Note that he does not merely use flower-imagery but supplies himself with real flowers. The scene ends with a desire not to rid himself of ‘love-thoughts’ but to enjoy them in another languid and sensuous setting.

Another characteristic of his language in this scene is wordplay. Shakespeare’s use of puns varies from the happy use of a verbal joke very popular at the time, to the grim puns of John of Gaunt, Mercutio, Hamlet, and Lady Macbeth. Punning alone would not suggest affectation, but here it is used, I think, to draw our attention to Orsino’s claustrophobic withdrawal from the outside world, that world which we are to break into in the next scene. Curio suggests activity, but Orsino’s obsession turns the idea of hunting into another amorous image, and the stock pun on hart and heart (later used by Olivia) rejects healthy exercise in favour of music and bowers. Orsino develops this pun with some possible irony. Certainly his desires do not strike us as having much resemblance to cruel pursuing hounds. Martin Holmes, in *Shakespeare’s Public*, criticises modern productions for making Orsino too languid, and refers to Sidney, Raleigh, and Essex, as men of action, philosophers, and ‘passionate amorists’.

It is true that a too languid Orsino will make the last scene abruptly melodramatic, but I think it is difficult not at any rate to accept that in the first scene he is at least in a very languid and inactive mood. The intervening scenes with Viola give the actor good opportunity to show Orsino in a less hothouse atmosphere. There is dramatic modulation from Orsino's preference for beds of flowers to his violence at the end. The language of his threatening speech in 5.1., is, incidentally, a good example of the occasion shaping the style. It is worth considering in detail.

Viola, a real exile and solitary, comes on to correct the languid tone, and though she too puns, as soon as she appears, her language seems to be less 'upholstered' (D. H. Lawrence's word for the Elizabethans) than Orsino's. Her exchange with the Captain playing on 'perchance' is brave wordplay showing her spirit. She has business to discuss, and in her first scene has no time for 'fancy'. Her brevity contrasts with Orsino's expansiveness, here and elsewhere. When Orsino asks for her reaction to the music, the short eloquent comment impresses him as mature for her years, charged with true feeling. Restraint suits her position as page and listener, and also suits her real restraint as a woman in disguise, loving her master. She has one or two elaborate speeches. She tells a fictitious story about a sister's love, and the extended simile of *Patience on a Monument* contrasts in its grandeur with, 'And yet I know not'. And she impersonates the courtier, in rich, formal, hyperbolic language—'The heavens rain odours upon you'—reminiscent of Orsino's style and appropriate language for an actor acting a part within the play.

This is a comedy, less concerned with minute psychological distinctions than Shakespeare's tragedies, though concerned with serious emotion. It is not surprising that style is not determined solely by characterisation, and it is, I think, only with Orsino and Viola that language is differentiated in these ways. It is much more difficult to isolate a style for Olivia, Sebastian, and Antonio. The comic characters have their style, but this deserves separate attention.

Questions:

1. Look at Viola's verse-speeches in 1.5. Are they 'characteristic' of her, of the situation, of the emotions revealed and hidden? Are they different from Orsino's speeches about the same subject?

2. There are not many elaborate metaphors in the play but here are some worth looking at in their context. Ask yourself what the words mean before you consider the dramatic effect: Five-fold blazon (1.5.297); Women's waxen hearts (2.2.30); Empty trunks o'erflourished (3.4.368); Time hath sowed a grizzle (5.1.164); Set mine honour at the stake (3.1.119.) I have here given line references to the New Cambridge Edition.

3.

COMIC LANGUAGE

Comic language is used to define characters, and also to offer its own comic appeal. A common feature of Elizabethan comedy is the display of various skills, eagerly appraised, no doubt, by those in the audience who had had some rhetorical training. These skills

include the exuberant invention of exaggerated or incongruous description and imagery, familiar to-day, and the less familiar skill in reasoning and repartee, which sometimes falls flat on a twentieth-century ear, though less on the stage than in the book. We can see in *Twelfth Night* how Shakespeare adapts these comic displays of wit and argument to his particular purposes of theme and character, and how he goes beyond this in making fun of some aspects of language itself. The comic language may define Sir Andrew and Malvolio in their folly and pride, but it may also satirise folly and pride of style itself.

Sir Andrew and Malvolio share pride and affectation, but they speak very differently. Malvolio's speech ranges from pompous and verbose rebuke and grandiose inflations of fantasy to scornful colloquial imagery and perverse punning. Sir Andrew has a simple and blundering speech, set against the accomplished language of Orsino and Feste as Dogberry's flounderings are set against the proficiency of Beatrice and Benedict. Different styles satirise pretentiousness. Sir Andrew uses long words, sometimes rightly but in satirical inappropriateness which suggests that Shakespeare is laughing at the word itself, as in 'mellifluous' sometimes ignorantly, as when he repeats Sir Toby's pun, 'contagious' (a grim plague joke) in a way which shows that he has missed the point. He bravely attempts French and collects some of Viola's affected courtly terms. When he writes his challenge to Viola, he tries balanced formality: 'Wonder not, nor admire not in thy mind, why I do call thee so, for I will show thee no reason for't' (3.4.) This letter, says Toby, is so 'excellently ignorant' that Viola will know it

comes from a clodpole, so it cannot be delivered. There are also his oaths, characteristic of braggart soldiers, his almost meaningless sentences which mingle honesty and boast, and his failure to keep up with the wit of Maria and Toby. On the whole his *forte* is simple-minded bewilderment, made nonsensical by complacency, and this is conveyed throughout his speech. He is the somewhat dazed connoisseur of Viola's fine words and Feste's verbal clowning, itself another element of verbal satire, as for instance in the nonsensical play with the Vapians and Picrogromitus.

Malvolio's most pretentious language is spoken in private, a brilliant dramatic stroke. His ordinary speech is often pedantic and pompous but in fantasy he goes further: 'There is no obstruction in this. And the end: what should that alphabetical position portend?' (2.5.) It struts: 'This simulation is not as the former: and yet, to crush it a little, it would bow to me' (2.5.) It is formal and feverish: 'I will be proud, I will read politic authors, I will baffle Sir Toby, I will wash off gross acquaintance, I will be point-devise the very man' (2.5.) The inflated formality of the false letter draws out all this, for the delectation of more than one audience.

Malvolio can show his killjoy spirit in puns when Olivia is asking him about Viola, and he fences sourly with the replies, 'Of mankind' and 'of very ill manner' (1.5.) This is juggling, but put in the context of character. The same is true of his witty blunt image for Viola's youth, 'as a squash is before 'tis a peascod', which is jealous and superior.

There are of course professionals in the game of wit. Sir Andrew, as he observes, does it 'more natural'

and Feste's 'better grace' has more than one function. His wit is skilful entertainment, both in parody and repartee, like his music. But like the music it is part of the dramatic unity, and it works as a vehicle for criticism. When he is proving Olivia to be a fool, syllogistically, when he is flashing polysyllabic splendours at Sir Andrew, when he is joking about Viola's youth, and, of course, when he is catechising Malvolio, he is criticising explicitly what the whole course of the play criticises. He is bringing out characteristic responses in others, and he is also entertaining with the dexterity of the trained verbal gymnast and the zany antics of the verbal clown. He is also presenting himself, that evasive and detached self whose professional activity includes skilful witty begging as well as a music which unifies, contrasts, and provides another source of true feeling.

But many of the other characters engage in witticisms too. Sir Toby's verbal teasing of Sir Andrew underlines their relation, and Sir Andrew's character. He uses his wit to defend cakes and ale. Maria's sharp jests are used to please Sir Toby. Olivia argues coldly with the truant Fool, is partly won in the course of the argument, and defends him, with more wit, against Malvolio's carping. The Fool's wit is frequently used with an ironical awareness of his own intelligence. All argue to entertain, but the wit is personal expression, in character, and making its criticism from particular values and viewpoints.

Because wit is in itself a source of comedy the actual forms of wit are not always individualised. The comic simile, or metaphor, makes its appeal chiefly in its own right, as a good joke. There are several

striking examples, like the comparison of Malvolio's face to 'the new map, with the augmentation of the Indies' or Feste's begging allusion to Troilus and Cressida, or the reference to Maria as the 'youngest wren of nine' or Malvolio's 'not black in mind though yellow in leg' or Sir Andrew's hair, hanging 'like flax on a distaff' or his place in Olivia's opinion 'like an icicle on a Dutchman's beard'. Some are visual extravagances, all are either unexpectedly appropriate or ridiculously inappropriate. There are far fewer dazzling verbal jokes, 'fire-new from the mint', than in John Lyly, an earlier comic dramatist, or in the earlier *Love's Labours Lost*. Most of the verbal comedy makes its contribution to the satirical unity of the play, part of the moving pattern of criticism and delight.

Questions:

1. Wit has been said to rely on surprise and incongruity. Does the dialogue between the Fool and Maria at the beginning of 1.5. meet this description?
2. What are the comic effects of language in 4.2. where Feste torments Malvolio?

FURTHER READING

1.

OTHER ELIZABETHAN PLAYS

The Use of Disguise

John Lyly: *Mother Bombye*.

Robert Greene: *James the Fourth*.

The Romantic Heroine

Robert Greene: *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*.

Thomas Dekker: *The Shoemaker's Holiday*.

The Braggart Soldier

Ben Jonson: *Every Man in his Humour*; *Every Man Out of his Humour*; *The Silent Woman*.

Beaumont and Fletcher: *King and no King*.

Multiple Plot

George Peele: *The Old Wives' Tale*.

Robert Greene: the two plays mentioned above.

2.

CRITICISM

Stagecraft and Conventions

M. C. Bradbrook: *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy; Shakespeare and Elizabethan Poetry*.

H. Granville Barker: 'Shakespeare's Dramatic Art', in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*.

W. Robertson Davies: *Shakespeare's Boy Actors*.

Richmond Noble: *Shakespeare's Use of Song*.

Ngaio Marsh: 'A Note on a Production of *Twelfth Night*', in *Shakespeare Survey*, 1955.

J. Dover Wilson: 'The Copy for *Twelfth Night*, 1623', in the New Cambridge edition of the play.

Language

Milton Crane: *Shakespeare's Prose*.

G. D. Willcock: 'Shakespeare and Elizabethan English', in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*.

Social Background (with special reference to *Twelfth Night*)

M. St. Clare Byrne: 'The Social Background', in *A Companion to Shakespeare Studies*.

Martin Holmes: *Shakespeare's Public*.

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